DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 422 CE 075 652

AUTHOR	Bocock, Jean; Edwards, Judith
TITLE	Assuring Quality in Collaborative Provision.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
ISSN	ISSN-1364-6869
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	17p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Mendip Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, United Kingdom (3.50 pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - General (140)
JOURNAL CIT	FEDA Bulletin; v2 n2 1998
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; Case Studies; Community Involvement; *Cooperative Programs; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Quality; Foreign Countries; Lifelong Learning; *Partnerships in Education; Postsecondary Education; *Quality Control; *School Business Relationship; School Community Relationship; Technical Institutes
IDENTIFIERS	Great Britain

ABSTRACT

This bulletin is intended to help British further education colleges clarify their rationale for entering into collaborative programs, assess prospective partners, define and implement good practice at all stages of provision, and establish rigorous quality assurance procedures. Following an introduction, Further Education Funding Council requirements are outlined. A section on rationale discusses these purposes: fulfilling the college mission and helping to meet growth targets, increase revenue, and improve the financial viability of the college. Next, management models are described. The next section lists questions that need to be considered when selecting collaborative partners. Steps for setting up the partnership are then listed. A section on quality assurance suggests contents of a quality manual and then outlines activities to ensure that quality is rigorously monitored at all stages of a program: on entry (initial guidance and assessment, enrollment, learning agreement); on- program (auditing college compliance with the contract, monitoring students' experiences of learning); on exit; and achievement. These suggestions are made for use of the information collected: self-assessment, contract review, and further improvement of quality. Two case studies offer insights into how colleges and their partners have managed collaborative provision and how they and their students have benefits. One is industry based, the other--community based. Contains 16 references. (YLB)

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ED 415 422

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

bulletin

Volume 2 Number 2

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Assuring quality in collaborative provision

Jean Bocock and Judith Edwards

February 1998 £3.50

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Introduction

Collaborative provision (or franchised provision, as it is commonly known) has increased considerably in recent years. The number of colleges making collaborative provision has increased from 149 in 1994–95 to 256 in 1996–97. The 20 largest providers account for 58% of provision measured in student numbers (FEFC *Council News* no 37, March 1997). Collaborative provision was responsible for 72% of the growth in student numbers funded by the FEFC in 1995–96. This represents 8% of the total full-time equivalent numbers in that year. Despite adverse publicity surrounding a few cases, it continues to form a significant proportion of the work of many colleges, helping them to meet activity targets, even though unrestricted growth has ended with the demise of demand-led element (DLE) funding.

In his evidence to the Secretary of State for Education, set out in *Learning for the twenty-first century*, Professor Bob Fryer has emphasised the importance of partnerships between colleges and employers, the voluntary and community sectors, if the goals of lifelong learning are to be achieved. Collaborative provision offers colleges the opportunity to widen participation through collaborative arrangements with partners who are better able to reach out to under-represented groups and to establish relationships with employers.

This *Bulletin* will help colleges to:

- clarify their rationale for entering into collaborative provision
- assess prospective partners
- define and implement good practice at all stages of provision
- establish rigorous quality assurance procedures.

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It will assist college managers at all levels – from senior managers who plan overall strategy, to curriculum managers with responsibility for overseeing collaborative provision. It will also help collaborative partners understand what is expected of them and the importance of documentation and quality monitoring.

The bulletin does not cover overseas provision or provision in Scotland or Northern Ireland, where different funding and control systems are in operation. It covers outward – not inward – collaborative provision. Initial ideas for this bulletin were presented at a development seminar, attended by a small number of senior staff with varied managerial responsibilities for collaborative provision, from a range of colleges. FEDA is grateful for their assistance in the preparation of this published version. Quotations and case studies in the bulletin were derived from the development seminar and interviews with colleges.

FEFC requirements

In April 1996 the FEFC in England issued Circular 96/06 which provided comprehensive guidance on arrangements for off-site collaborative provision. This circular sets out rigorous procedures. It also suggests control criteria and a model contract. Colleges are urged to use this or seek legal advice if amendments are considered essential. Further supplementary guidance has since been issued. Circulars 96/08 and 97/02 explain the FEFC's audit requirements for collaborative provision. Circular 96/32 provides 'supplementary guidance on collaborative provision', answering several queries about which colleges sought further clarification after the publication of 96/06.

The FEFCW has issued similar guidance for this provision (referred to as 'third party provision') in Wales. Bulletin B96/12 and its supplement set out the FEFCW's guidance.

In his annual report for 1996–97, the FEFC's chief inspector commented that:

> *. . . there are no inherent weaknesses in franchising. All types of provision can be successfully managed and quality controlled if there is a strong commitment to standards, the allocation of sufficient resources, and robust monitoring arrangements are in place.*

He noted that the best practice includes:

- strategic commitment to franchised provision
- clear lines of communication with collaborative partners
- identification of staff responsible for regular monitoring and reporting on the quality of teaching
- thoroughly documented procedures for quality assurance
- teaching and learning materials customised to the needs of the client.

The chief inspector cautioned that:

> *Much work remains to be done to ensure that the quality assurance procedures are as rigorously applied to franchised provision as to that offered on the college's premises. Colleges . . . need to pay more attention to evaluating the teaching and learning on franchised courses and ensure that individual students on franchised courses receive the support they need.*

The central message in all the FEFC's and FEFCW's guidance is a simple one. Off-site collaborative provision allows colleges to deliver their curriculum in other, more appropriate, locations. Colleges are fully responsible for management, delivery and quality assurance and should maintain normal procedures for these, with suitable adaptations where necessary.

Rationale

Colleges should have clear reasons for involvement in collaborative provision. Clarity of purpose is essential if they are to realise the benefits of well-managed schemes for themselves and, more importantly, their students. Purposes might include fulfilling the college mission and helping to meet growth targets, increase revenue and improve the college's financial viability.

Fulfilling the college mission

Colleges that wish to widen participation may do so more successfully in partnership with other organisations that already work well with under-represented or under-achieving groups. Ideal partners include:

- community and voluntary organisations
- local education authorities and external institutions
- youth work programmes
- providers of services for students with disabilities or learning difficulties, or programmes for adults with mental health difficulties
- employers.

Colleges, moreover, can learn from their partners. This enables them to adopt practices which can move this provision from the margins to the mainstream – a goal of both the Kennedy Committee's *Widening Participation* and Tomlinson's *Inclusive Learning* reports.

Most colleges are committed to working with employers, both public and private. Such partnerships enable colleges to contribute to National Targets for Training and Education (NTETs). Some industries can provide more appropriate equipment and more cost-effective training methods than colleges are able to offer. The collaborative partner's expertise is often critical to the programme's success, and can benefit the college in the longer term. Joint curriculum and staff development affords college staff the opportunity for professional updating. The assistance of experienced college lecturers in curriculum development and quality monitoring helps employers deliver high quality training, benefiting employer and employee alike. The importance of this work is likely to grow with the implementation of the government's Welfare to Work proposals. Colleges serving a rural community may equally benefit from geographically dispersed collaborative partnerships.

Helping to meet growth targets, increase revenue and improve the financial viability of the college

> *The college, because of its isolated situation with little competition and a finite number of 16 to 18-year-olds in the area, needed to look beyond the catchment area and in the adult market if it was to achieve growth targets. Collaborative work also enables us to increase access to training and education through the community college network.*

Although the imperative to increase growth targets has ceased for many colleges since changes to DLE funding, collaborative provision remains an attractive option because it is normally less expensive.

While enhancing income may be a major and legitimate imperative for colleges, they should not see collaborative partnerships as a quick fix. Given the many changes to funding methodology, it would be unwise to base the development of provision wholly on increasing college revenue. Partnerships require institutional investment, as is evident from the quality procedures identified in this bulletin. There are also 'hidden' costs. Partners' staff may need training to understand the FE culture and FEFC monitoring and inspection requirements.

Colleges must be aware of the true cost of their activities and undertake a full business risk analysis before entering into agreements. They need to consider possible cash flow problems, and recognise that failure to meet FEFC's control criteria will result in non-payment by the FEFC. If collaborative provision brings in only marginal revenues, it may cost the college more to provide than any revenue it generates. Moreover, the commitment is often implicitly ongoing, since removal of funding in subsequent years is likely to tarnish relationships.

Colleges may wish to consider specific types or categories of collaborative provision in relation to their mission. They may choose to limit the proportion of such provision, and identify one-off, short-term or longer-term partnerships. Some colleges deliberately distinguish between commercial and community partnerships, with a different rationale for each.

> *Commercial and community franchising in the college are separately managed, though a close working relationship exists. Community franchising offers educational provision to groups who have not traditionally accessed it, e.g. women from ethnic minority groups. It assists community development by increasing the skills of those involved in delivery. Commercial franchising involves working with employers (public and private) and providers to increase access and lift standards of educational training by implementing quality procedures, accrediting training to generic qualifications, and contributing to NTETs.*

For collaborative provision to work, there needs to be a balance between funding issues and strategic objectives. It must also contribute to fulfillment of the college's mission. Clarifying the rationale assists colleges to set out clearly the criteria which will be used to assess prospective partners.

Management issues

The role of the corporation board in strategic decision-making and in accepting ultimate responsibility for the quality of collaborative provision needs to be clearly set out and understood by all. Colleges need to consider carefully the managerial requirements of off-site collaborative provision. They must establish clear lines of control and responsibility. There are many models for this.

Options considered by FEDA project colleges include:

- **a senior 'franchise manager' or specialist unit**
  Dedicated administrative/clerical support is considered essential, but provision is often inadequate. This arrangement strengthens planning, co-ordination and monitoring of the college strategy. It particularly supports compliance with the college's quality assurance and control arrangements by standardising documentation, recording and other monitoring procedures (described later in this *Bulletin*).

- **separate management of community and commercial collaborative provision**
  A close working relationship is, however, essential.

- **devolution of responsibility for quality monitoring to a designated college quality assurance manager**
  This has the advantage of ensuring that arrangements for monitoring the quality of collaborative provision are identical to (or closely aligned with) college arrangements. There is a serious risk, however, that college curriculum teams (and even franchise managers) may lose any sense of ownership or responsibility for quality assurance.

- **devolution of responsibility to departmental or faculty leaders or curriculum managers**
  This enables curriculum managers and their teams to work closely with off-site providers in curriculum development and aspects of delivery, such as assessment. This can lead to close integration of off-site provision into the college's work. However, without clear lines of management and control, it can lead to a fragmented, ad hoc approach, particularly in the area of quality assurance.

Management at all levels needs to be planned. A senior manager, who is a member of the senior management team, was appointed to manage collaborative provision. The manager meets all collaborative partners in a regular meeting either individually or in groups to manage contracts and develop new ones. At middle management level a quality manager monitors provision through a set of control measures. The quality manager is also a member of the Quality Strategy Committee and the Curriculum Review Committee to ensure co-ordination. At course level various people take on liaison/co-ordination roles.

Whatever management arrangements are selected, successful collaborative provision requires full integration of off-site delivery into the college's systems, structures and procedures. Everyone needs to be clear where decision-making is located. Reports on the quality of provision need to be made at appropriate managerial levels including to the corporation board. A quality policy and procedures document covering collaborative provision will help smooth devolution of responsibility to appropriate levels and remove the risk of potentially costly or embarrassing mistakes.

Assessing prospective partners

Care must be exercised in selecting collaborative partners. The college's reputation and finance and the students' well-being are at stake. If things go wrong, it is the college's responsibility. The following questions need to be considered:

- Does this partnership accord with the college's mission and strategic priorities?
- Would the employer have funded the programme independently?
- Is the organisation financially sound?
- Has the partner costed its provision?
- Will courses lead to a recognised qualification?
- Do the premises in which provision will be delivered meet health and safety requirements?
- Are the premises accessible to students with disabilities?
- Are all tutors/trainers appropriately qualified and experienced? Curriculum vitae of all staff should be supplied and include details of qualifications, assessor/verifier awards, teaching and training experience, industrial experience, training in guidance and initial assessment.
- Do partners understand the importance of notifying college staff of any staff changes made during the delivery of the programme?
- Can any deficiencies in the skills of programme deliverers be remedied by further training? If not, will college staff be used to supplement areas of the delivery or assessment?
- Does the collaborator have policies and procedures for:
  - equal opportunities
  - health and safety
  - staff induction
  - staff development
  - appraisal
  - student appeals
  - internal verification
  - quality assurance?

  Do such policies and procedures meet the college's requirements? Wherever possible collaborative partners should be encouraged to use the college's policies and procedures. Care must be taken to ensure that all delivery staff understand and can implement these policies. Documentation and records provided by partners are a frequent cause of problems.
- Is the partner's insurance adequate and renewed to cover the duration of the agreement?
- Has the partner a good track record, particularly in other collaborative work with this or any other college?
- Is the partner simultaneously recruiting students from other institutions or funders? If so, what steps are taken to guarantee the service should funding problems arise with other institutions or funders? What is done to ensure that students know they have enrolled with the college and are entitled to access all the college's services?
- Will marketing and publicity clearly indicate the college's role in the partnership?
- Does the contract clarify what steps will be taken by the college and its partner to resolve any difficulties?

Many colleges with well-managed off-site collaborative provision create a customer contact form and accompanying checklist. This facilitates checking and recording of the criteria listed above. If responsibility for assessing prospective partners is devolved to curriculum managers, a senior manager should have responsibility for ensuring that the assessment has been conducted according to the college's criteria.

Drawing up the contract is a rigorous procedure. A gap analysis is carried out between the college and the organisation concerned. Quality benchmarks within the college are compared with those of the organisation and an action plan is drawn up to fill any gaps.

Setting up the partnership

When the college and partner have concluded that a viable programme can be offered, the following steps are recommended:

- Visit the delivery site(s) and conduct an audit to ascertain that all criteria listed above have been/can be met. If possible, arrange to talk to the delivery team to check that they, too, understand and recognise the importance of meeting requirements. Complete a written report and copy to the collaborative partner.
- Negotiate remedial action if required.
- Agree recording procedures, including registers and records of assessments, internal verification, achievement and destinations.
- Clarify and agree the guided learning hours (number and definition). This requires particular attention, as does the system for assessment and recording of on-the-job training.
- Clarify and agree the possible use of accreditation of prior learning (APL). This poses at least as many difficulties for collaborative partners as it does for many colleges.
- Plan a timetable of regular visits by the college and meetings between college and partner's staff. All meetings need to be minuted. Additional spot checks during the programme delivery period are an essential part of quality monitoring arrangements.
- Arrange other visits, for example, to observe initial guidance and induction (especially for lengthy programmes), or to involve college staff in training provided by the partners for their staff.
- Invite partners to relevant college meetings or events (such as staff meetings or open days).
- Where distance prohibits frequent visits, arrange suitable alternative mechanisms for quality monitoring, such as telephone surveys or arrangements with an institution closer to the provision which may carry out visits on behalf of the college.
- Set up MIS (management information) systems which meet the external auditors' requirements to monitor and control collaborative work.
- Validate the provision through the college's procedures for validation of new courses. In some colleges, validation takes place within the portfolio of relevant curriculum and programme areas (for instance, Business Studies or Construction). This practice often leads to increased ownership by relevant staff and greater involvement in and responsibility for the quality of the programme delivered off-site.
- Agree the contract, spending as long as necessary to go through each clause to ensure understanding of the agreement.

These processes are time consuming, but will reduce the risk of subsequent misunderstanding and problems. They should, therefore, be viewed as a worthwhile investment of time. Moreover, they will clearly establish the college's ownership of the programme, even when college procedures are considerably modified by mutual agreement.

The importance of good record keeping within the college cannot be overstated. Many colleges set up a file for each collaborative partnership in which they keep copies of all documentation including, for example, contracts, staff CVs, programme details, minutes of meetings, records of monitoring visits, all returns made by the partner, and records of payments. These files provide the starting point for the college's internal quality auditing procedures and for FEFC inspection of collaborative provision.

Quality assurance

The college is responsible for ensuring that appropriate quality assurance arrangements are in place. They must agree these with collaborative partners and identify responsibilities within the college. Whatever arrangements are agreed, it is recommended that a named manager should be specified for each collaborative partnership with clearly established responsibilities, including quality monitoring. Each collaborative partner should also have a named individual responsible for overseeing the provision. This not only ensures problems are dealt with promptly, but also helps to underpin longer-term collaboration where appropriate.

There are many models for quality management. These usually reflect agreed management structures for such provision. There is a growing consensus that monitoring and audit should be closely integrated into the college's systems and within the particular programme and curriculum area. For example, if classroom observation is planned for the college construction courses, a sample of collaborative provision in construction will be included in both the observation and ensuing report.

It may be useful for quality assessment reports of collaborative provision to be identified separately within a programme or curriculum area report. This aids aggregation and benchmarking. It also assists the development and dissemination of good practice.

Quality manual

Some colleges issue a quality manual to all collaborative partners. It may include:

- the college quality policy
- validation requirements
- procedures for advice and guidance, enrolment, induction, delivery of the programme and recording of achievement
- samples of documentation that the college requires the partner to complete (enrolment forms, learning agreements, withdrawal forms)
- summary of returns: pre-course; one week after enrolment; weekly returns for special circumstances such as premature withdrawal; cancelled sessions; complaints; end of programme (completed register, API documents) and awarding body listings of achievements, as soon as these are available
- college policies which must be followed, such as health and safety
- programme of required monitoring and audit activities which may be conducted by college staff or collaborative partners and accompanying documentation. A 'course log' can be particularly helpful. An example in the College Business Managers' Association's *Franchising: Good Practice Pack* (1996) is useful.

The quality manual's contents may need to be adapted in the light of institutional quality assurance and monitoring procedures and the nature of the collaborative provision. Much of the documentation will, however, be required to establish a clear audit trail for college and FEFC auditors.

> *To ensure consistency and control the college produces a 'Quality Assurance and Collaborative Provision Manual'. The centre which manages the collaborative provision has been accredited with ISO9002. The manual outlines procedures and practices which both meet the ISO standards and are consistent with the college quality assurance policy. All collaborators receive a copy and training in how it works. Designating the monitoring of collaborative provision to a single quality manager with administrative support is the key here.*

Some colleges issue induction packs to all delivery staff in off-site provision. The packs summarise their obligations in a simplified form, and direct them to the quality manual for further detail.

On entry

Initial guidance and assessment

College staff should either undertake initial guidance and assessment themselves or satisfy themselves that partners have the knowledge and skills to meet college requirements. Training of partners' staff may be necessary. The college may seek greater involvement in these processes if, for example, it wishes to enhance its own understanding of the needs of under-represented groups.

In the long term, this may result in increased enrolment of individuals from such groups into mainstream college courses. Active involvement in the guidance offered to the employees of industrial partners may enhance their progression into the college.

Initial assessment should be carried out in accordance with normal college procedures to identify any additional learning support needs. Arrangements for identifying the need for and provision of learning support are often inadequate in collaborative provision.

Adaptations to the college's normal procedures may be advisable. However, this needs to be limited to ensure that prospective students have the same entitlement to impartial guidance and suitable assessment as all other college students.

Guidance should normally include information on:

- primary learning objective/qualification aim
- subsequent progression routes (illustrated if possible by information about previous students' destinations)
- entry requirements
- exemptions from parts of a programme by virtue of qualifications already held
- arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning
- fees and other costs (materials, equipment, etc) Students need to be aware of total maximum costs before enrolment, as unexpected expenses sometimes cause them to leave.
- financial support available, and equipment and materials provided
- course content and delivery methods, including: induction arrangements, work placements, tutorial provision and so forth
- assessment arrangements (including assessment methods, frequency and appeals procedures) and recording of progress
- availability of further educational, career and personal guidance or support.

Although this list is lengthy, the processes do not necessarily require much time. A good checklist can speed up the process. Students with complex requirements may be referred to a college's central admissions service. Guidance can be given or supplemented in various ways, such as course literature, by telephone or in group sessions.

Enrolment

Most students will enrol off-site, and the procedures will be carried out by collaborative partners. Selection and rejection are at the discretion of the college with rights of appeal as set out in the college charter. The college needs to take precautions to check that college enrolment forms are used. Students should be aware that they are on a college course (which is delivered off-site), and that they are entitled to all the services and facilities of the college and must fulfil their responsibilities as students of the college.

The simplest way to do this is to:

- Supply college handbooks including charter and complaints procedures.
- Brief the staff who will carry out the enrolment. Although the collaborative project manager understands the college's systems and documents, the teachers, trainers or administrative staff involved in enrolment may be ignorant of them.
- Observe and monitor the enrolment process. This could be part of the college's internal audit of guidance, enrolment and induction – an element of a college's self-assessment process.
- Send a welcome letter to all students on off-site programmes when their enrolment forms have been processed, reinforcing the message that they have enrolled with the college.

College managers run training sessions in initial guidance and assessment procedures with all collaborators. They also join some enrolment sessions to offer support and ensure compliance. The contract outlines the procedures to be followed on entry and specifies the absolute right of the college to control the admission of students. Enrolment forms include a declaration signed by staff and students that initial guidance and assessment has taken place.

An important part of the audit process at enrolment is checking that students exist. Fraudulent claims, though rare, must be guarded against. Checks may include:

- telephone sampling
- checking a sample of names against the electoral register
- checking registers
- spot-check visits.

If partners are told in advance that such checks are applied from time to time, this will often be enough to deter fraud.

Learning agreement

The learning agreement must satisfy FEFC requirements. Colleges need to guide collaborative partners on the adequacy of guided learning hours. They must establish systems which monitor the agreed hours and methods of delivery and ensure they are adhered to. Guided learning hours must be recorded and audited. Difficulties usually arise when the collaborative partners' delivery staff are not adequately briefed or trained in how to fulfil the requirements of the learning agreement. It is well worth the effort to prevent problems, for instance by issuing a simple guidance note or arranging a briefing session.

On-programme

The learning programme and its mode of delivery may be developed entirely by the college, jointly by the college and its partner, or predominantly by the partner. This relationship may change as partners get to know each other. The extent of their collaboration will affect how the college deals with aspects of quality assurance and control. At first, the college's concern will necessarily centre predominantly on whether the partner can deliver the specified outcomes to agreed standards.

In the case of joint developments, greater scrutiny is needed to validate both the learning programme and the proposed means of delivery. Close links between programme deliverers in the college and those of the collaborative partners increase the opportunity for mutual learning.

Once the programme has begun, the college needs to implement rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to satisfy itself that:

> *the quality of the experience for the students, and the standard of achievement required for an award, should match that of the parent institution.*

This excerpt from paragraph 10.74 of Dearing's report into *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (July 1997) demonstrates the universality of this requirement for collaborative provision.

Suggestions below will assist colleges to collect and monitor returns, monitor the quality of delivery and judge students' (and other stakeholders') satisfaction with the provision.

Activities to monitor quality

There are many ways in which to monitor quality:

- auditing delivery of contractual agreements
- monitoring the quality of the students' learning experience
- conducting regular reviews.

Any of these can be incorporated into the college's self-assessment procedures and its annual self-assessment report, accompanied by supporting evidence.

While college procedures need to be followed closely, adaptations are sometimes required, particularly when off-site provision takes place a considerable distance from the college. In such cases it is imperative that the collaborative partner establishes rigorous quality assurance procedures and that the college approves them. These procedures must be verified by occasional visits and supplemented by practices such as telephone surveys to gauge student satisfaction.

The FEFC Circular *Validating Self Assessment* (97/12) provides a useful model. Partners can be asked to produce an annual self-assessment report. College audit/inspection teams can visit, check evidence and observe teaching and learning. They can interview students, staff and any other stakeholders. Most partners will require staff training in preparing a self-assessment report, with clear guidance about how to gather and present appropriate evidence. Staff from partner organisations could be invited to attend training sessions in the college to economise on time.

As both college and collaborative partners will carry out a range of monitoring activities, it is important to specify in the Quality Manual precisely what is expected of the partners, when they should do it, and how these procedures link into the college's activities. Reporting requirements (format, content, circulation, and so forth) should also be specified.

Auditing college compliance with the contract

As well as checking that all required forms are completed and returns submitted by due dates, from time to time colleges need to audit their own procedures. Is data entered, collated and reported according to an agreed timetable? Are payments made to partners by due dates?

Monitoring students' experience of learning

Visits provide the best opportunity to check documents and talk to students and staff. If visits are carefully planned and recorded they do not need to be frequent – as long as each visit is comprehensive. Visits by college staff from the same programme or curriculum area offer the opportunity to share ideas and expertise (a two-way process) and consider possible curriculum developments. The chief inspector noted in his annual report that:

> *the monitoring visits that colleges make to franchise partners as yet rarely include classroom observation by subject specialists.*

If the prime purpose of monitoring – checking students' progress – is to be accomplished, colleges need to set targets for frequency of visits and specify what should be covered during the visits.

During visits colleges may:

- Observe the processes for enrolment and induction, and check that:
  - forms are correctly completed
  - students have received impartial guidance and advice
  - students have been assessed for their suitability for the programme and any additional support requirements
  - students have received an induction pack which includes the college charter and complaints procedures.

  Colleges should also check whether students know to whom they should complain within the collaborative partnership and whom to approach in the college if they are not happy with the outcome. Delivery staff must know the procedure for dealing with and recording the outcomes of any complaint.

- Check that the tutor or trainer delivering each aspect of the programme has been approved by the college and has the necessary qualifications both to deliver training and to assess achievement. Care must be taken to note whether any staff changes have been made since the initial agreement of the partnership, that these have been notified to the college, and that replacement staff are suitably qualified.

- Observe teaching and learning. This is an essential part of quality monitoring. While it should conform to the college's agreed observation procedures (including checking schemes of work and other evidence of planning), additional attention needs to be paid to issues such as quality of equipment and materials and observation of health and safety procedures.

- Monitor students' progress and achievement by checking records of achievement, the quality of work in portfolios, and the quality of the feedback students receive. It can be useful to observe feedback and action planning during tutorials.

- Monitor student attendance, reasons for absence or withdrawal and actions taken to resolve problems.

- Follow up any issues identified in external verifier reports. Has the college made arrangements to receive these directly from external verifiers or within agreed timescales if they are sent directly to the partner?

- Monitor, where applicable, internal verification procedures, reports and follow-up of identified issues.

- Observe or conduct student review meetings to explore students' satisfaction; and check that action has been taken following earlier student review meetings.

- Meet student representatives. (Student representative systems are, however, surprisingly rare in collaborative provision.)

- Meet staff, perhaps by attending a staff meeting, and check minutes of staff meetings (including following up any agreed actions).

- Check the complaints recording procedures. Follow up a few items to ensure a satisfactory outcome has been achieved.

- Check the arrangements for giving advice on progression opportunities (and ascertain students' satisfaction with this).

As well as following a pre-planned programme of visits, spot checks are an indispensable element of quality assurance. Other mechanisms are valuable, too: questionnaires to ascertain satisfaction and receive suggestions for development from students, staff and other stakeholders (such as employers offering work placements); and telephone surveys of any of the above.

On exit

Colleges should ensure that students are made aware of progression opportunities and the availability of careers guidance and counselling. Realistically, the extent and importance of this will vary according to the programme. Nonetheless, it is important that this is not ignored in work-based programmes.

Two contrasting experiences:

The greatest benefit of the collaborative agreement (using the Community Education Service) is that local residents have guaranteed progression into the college system in premises that are easily accessible.

Progression is not always possible. An organisation might want all employees to undertake an NVQ2 but have limited requirements at NVQ3. Nonetheless our end of course follow-up form asks students whether they have considered further training with their employer, with us or with another local college.

Achievement

Prompt collection of achievement statistics is vital. To achieve it, colleges need to specify in their contract or quality manual how and by when this information will be delivered. Some programmes – for example, some adult basic education programmes with community partners – as yet have no accredited outcomes. Here the college is often the awarding body. Elsewhere colleges are helping to develop accreditation within existing collaborative arrangements, for instance via NVQ. In such cases the college is usually the accredited/approved centre. This may also involve offering further training for staff; for example, where line managers are to become assessors. Some programmes are run in conjunction with national organisations which validate specialist vocational qualifications. Most lead to accredited outcomes but a variety of routes to achieve this is reflected in collaborative arrangements.

> *Our initial meetings and the monitoring process all emphasise the importance of achievement. On the whole, franchised provision has a lower drop-out rate than college-based provision.*

Reviewing the provision

The activities outlined in the preceding sections will ensure that quality is rigorously monitored at all stages of a programme. To what use should all this information be put?

Self-assessment

If the procedures used to monitor quality are similar to those of the parent institution, it will be easy to feed the information into annual self-assessment reports. (Usually such data can be included as part of a curriculum or programme area self-assessment report.) Some colleges ask each collaborative partner to produce a self-assessment report by a suitable date (often around April or May).

The FEFC's new inspection framework, *Validating Self-Assessment* (Circular 97/12), and the FEFCW's Bulletin *Future Arrangements for Quality Assessment in Wales* (B97/09) provide appropriate models which can be followed by colleges and their partners. In these models, collaborative partners carry out their own quality monitoring and self-assessment, and colleges adopt a similar role to that of the FEFC and FEFCW in verifying the accuracy of their partners' self-assessment.

Contract review

Some colleges review the contract every three months, involving the provider and students in the review. Others carry out an annual review of all collaborative contracts, in which issues such as cost-effectiveness are taken into account. Few, however, carry out a detailed annual review in which all issues are taken into account. The college should review the achievements of its collaborative provision against its strategic plan and rationale. Action planning for the next academic year will complete the cycle.

Further improvement of quality

The goal of all quality assurance procedures must be continuous improvement of quality. The FEFC's and FEFCW's inspection frameworks place self-assessment centre stage for sector colleges. Colleges will be judged not only on the accuracy of their self-assessment, but also on the extent to which their processes lead to improvement of their students' learning experiences. Quality assurance procedures must, therefore, be an integral part of strategic and operational planning. This applies equally to college-based and to collaborative provision.

Case studies

The following two case studies offer insights into how colleges and their partners have managed collaborative provision, and how they and their students have benefited.

Industry-based collaborative provision

The college became involved in an industrial training programme which, at the outset, seemed to have limited scope for college involvement. A company was seeking access to training materials on food hygiene to be used in its induction training programme for meat packers. An initial meeting with the training officer revealed that she had both a background in training and development and a thorough knowledge of the food hygiene regulations. It was suggested that she might train on behalf of the college and deliver the CIEH Basic Food Hygiene Certificate. Employees would benefit by being trained to a national standard and receiving a transferable qualification. This was done under a collaborative agreement and generated income into the company's training budget. A risk analysis was carried out, and the employees working in the cooked meats division were put through an Intermediate Food Hygiene Course run at the college.

The meat training council has recently developed an NVQ dealing with the handling and packaging of meats. The training officer wanted to run this NVQ in both factory sites. The college trained six line managers at each site in Vocational Assessor Awards (D32/33) and the training officer to Internal Verifier (D34). The college then developed the learning materials to fulfil the underpinning knowledge requirements of the qualification. The company is providing the skills training element, and 25 students on each site are now on programme. The college will be involved throughout with student support and portfolio development.

Benefits to the company

- raises workforce skills
- improves levels and standards of training
- improves workers' self-image and performance
- supports company business aims.

Benefits to the employee

- individual needs assessed and independent advice made available
- access to transferable vocational qualifications rather than company-specific training.

Benefits to the college

- helps meet FEFC targets and fulfil mission
- increases income
- positions the college in the community and increases customer base.

Community-based collaborative provision

An established charitable project provided adult basic education through IT for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Delivery took place in a number of daycare centres. Loss of its European funding threatened the future of the project. An approach was made to the college, whose aims enable it to support training which meets the following criteria:

- training which otherwise would not be available
- training which corresponds to existing college strengths
- training which is within reasonable travelling distance.

The charity submitted detailed proposals to a standard format which itemised resources, audited accounts, programme details and proposed delivery. The college set up a validation panel to approve programmes and lecturers. This resulted in a three-year franchising contract, with an emphasis on partnership to provide financial stability.

The new programme uses existing open college network units and new customised units to meet the specific needs of students. Every effort has been made to foster curriculum links between the college and the project. Staff development sessions have taken place locally and at the college. Standard college procedures and policies on student guidance and support, enrolment, the student charter and handbook, registration and data collection are used. Students can access all college facilities.

The college has a clear management structure for collaborative provision. A single senior manager has overall strategic responsibility for off-site collaborative provision. This manager liaises with the project manager and reports on this and other projects to the senior management team at least once per term.

A nominated quality assurance manager oversees the application of the college quality assurance mechanisms for each project. This involves overseeing course monitoring and evaluation plans, classroom observations, quality file audits and other procedures at all the delivery centres. The course team reports from each centre, and the college academic board receives the annual quality review reports in the same way as those from internal college course teams.

The co-ordinator for franchised provision carries out spot-check visits to centres to verify attendance and compliance with health and safety provisions, and to check the student experience. The college is the approved centre for awarding bodies. There is a unified approach to external verification. The college engages internal verifiers, and its examinations officer co-ordinates student assessment/achievement records across the project.

The charitable project now enjoys greater financial security. College and project staff have benefited from mutual development sessions and students continue to receive a high quality service.

Conclusion

Collaborative provision has much to offer in the years to come. If the goals of lifelong learning expressed in *Learning for the twenty-first century* (the report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning) are to be achieved, the voluntary and community sectors will play an increasing role in providing high-quality learning opportunities. Much of this work will be collaborative provision. In the same report, there is a call for expansion of learning in the workplace, particularly for low-skilled, unqualified employees. Learning in the 21st century will involve more partnerships and more learning outside institutions.

To ensure the quality of that learning, the lessons of the FEFC Chief Inspector's annual report 1996–97 must be heeded. Rigorous quality assurance procedures which focus on students' learning experiences must produce reliable information for use by college managers and governors. Governors will need to appreciate the significant role played by collaborative provision and take appropriate steps to monitor it. The sector can then have confidence in the quality of students' learning experiences, wherever they may learn.

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Acknowledgements

FEDA would like to thank the representatives of the following colleges who participated in a development seminar: Bishop Burton College, Dudley College of Technology, Newham College of FE, North Devon College, St Austell College and Tile Hill College of FE. Managers of Herefordshire College of Technology and Southport College of FE offered helpful documents and ideas, for which we are grateful.

Jean Bocock conducted the research and produced the report upon which this publication is based. Her role in this publication is gratefully acknowledged.

Publication credits

Editor **Sara Clay** Designer **Dave Shaw** Printers **Blackmore Ltd**, Shaftesbury, Dorset
Published by the **Further Education Development Agency** (FEDA), Dumbarton House, 68 Oxford Street, London W1N 0DA
Tel: [0171] 436 0020 Fax: [0171] 436 0349
Feedback and orders should be directed to **FEDA Publications Department**, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Tel: [01761] 462 503 Fax: [01761] 463 104